



Myth, Migration, and Cultural Hybridity in a Globalized World: Reimagining Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

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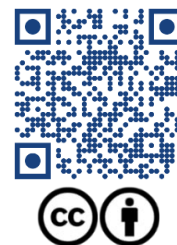
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Abstract— *Globalization has intensified cultural exchanges, migrations, and transnational interactions, leading to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. Literature provides a powerful medium through which the complexities of globalization can be examined. This article explores the process of cultural hybridization in Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh. The novel brings together folklore, migration narratives, ecological crises, and global capitalism, revealing how local traditions intersect with global forces. The study argues that cultural hybridization in the narrative emerges through the reinterpretation of myth, the movement of people across borders, and the interaction between indigenous knowledge and global modernity. The legend of the merchant Bonduki Sadagar functions as a cultural bridge linking the Sundarbans to global migration networks extending to Europe. By analyzing narrative structure, mythic symbolism, and character experiences, the article demonstrates how globalization transforms cultural identities while simultaneously preserving traditional cultural memory. The novel ultimately suggests that hybrid cultural formations are not merely consequences of globalization but also creative responses to ecological and social transformations in the contemporary world.*



Keywords— *Cultural hybridization, environmental humanities, globalization, migration, myth*

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has fundamentally reshaped cultural identities and social relationships in the contemporary world. Increased mobility, technological connectivity, and transnational economic networks have enabled cultures to interact more intensely than ever before. One of the most significant outcomes of these interactions is cultural hybridization—the blending of cultural forms, beliefs, and practices that emerge when different cultures encounter each other. In literary studies, globalization has generated new perspectives for understanding how narratives represent transnational experiences. Contemporary fiction frequently portrays characters who inhabit multiple cultural worlds, negotiating identity in contexts shaped by migration, ecological crisis, and global capitalism. The novel *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh offers a compelling exploration of these issues. The narrative moves between

the Sundarbans, Kolkata, Los Angeles, and Venice, illustrating how local myths and cultural traditions intersect with global migration and climate change. At the centre of the story is the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, a merchant who attempts to escape the wrath of the snake goddess Manasa but ultimately becomes entangled in a global journey. The novel also demonstrates how globalization transforms cultural narratives while simultaneously preserving local traditions. By integrating myth, migration, and environmental discourse, Ghosh creates a narrative that exemplifies cultural hybridization. This article examines how cultural hybridization operates in the novel through three key dimensions: the reinterpretation of myth, the experience of migration, and the interaction between local ecological knowledge and global environmental discourse.

II. MYTH AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

One of the most striking features of *Gun Island* is its reinterpretation of folklore within a global context. The narrative revolves around the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, a merchant who attempts to escape the power of the snake goddess Manasa. This story originates in the traditional Bengali Manasamangal narratives but is reimagined within contemporary realities shaped by migration and ecological crisis. By situating an ancient myth within modern global contexts, Amitav Ghosh demonstrates how mythic narratives continue to evolve in response to historical change. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Dinanath Datta encounters a shrine dedicated to Bonduki Sadagar in the Sundarbans. Reflecting on its unusual nature, he notes that it is “a temple dedicated not to a deity but to a man who had tried to flee from a goddess” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 27). This observation sparks Dinanath’s curiosity about the legend and its cultural significance. The shrine suggests how folklore continues to survive within everyday spaces while inviting reinterpretation. As Dinanath investigates further, he begins to perceive unexpected parallels between the myth and contemporary patterns of migration. Considering the merchant’s journey across distant seas, he observes that the story “seemed to describe a journey that stretched far beyond the waters of Bengal” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 95). The legend thus expands from a localized religious narrative into a story that anticipates modern global mobility. This connection becomes clearer when Dinanath encounters migrants whose journeys resemble the mythic trajectory of Bonduki Sadagar. Watching refugees undertake perilous voyages in search of safety, he reflects that their stories seemed “strangely reminiscent of the old legend of the merchant who had tried to outrun destiny” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 184). Through this narrative parallel, the novel suggests that myths function as cultural frameworks through which societies interpret new historical experiences.

The transformation of the Bonduki Sadagar legend can be understood through the theoretical framework of Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that cultural meaning emerges within what he calls the “Third Space,” where different traditions interact and generate new interpretations. As he writes, “It is that Third Space...which ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). Similarly, Hall argues that cultural identity is not fixed but continually reshaped through historical experience. According to Hall, identities are “not an essence but a positioning” (Hall, 1990, p. 226). The novel also resonates with the insights of Appadurai, who emphasizes the importance of global cultural flows in

shaping modern identities. Appadurai describes globalization as a world characterized by “ethnoscapes,” or shifting landscapes created by the movement of people across borders (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33).

III. MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

Migration occupies a central place in *Gun Island*, where the movement of people across borders becomes a key lens through which globalization is understood. The narrative repeatedly links the Sundarbans with distant locations such as Venice, suggesting that local ecological crises are inseparable from global patterns of displacement. The character Tipu illustrates this dynamic. Drawn into networks of migrants attempting to reach Europe, he becomes part of a precarious system of transnational mobility driven by economic hardship and environmental instability. His story reflects the pressures faced by many young people in the Sundarbans, where rising sea levels and limited opportunities push individuals toward uncertain migration routes. Dinanath gradually realizes the scale of this displacement. Reflecting on the situation, he observes that entire communities seem to be moving because their environments are becoming uninhabitable (Ghosh, 2019, p. 166). The remark underscores how ecological change in one region can produce social consequences across continents. The migrant journeys become especially visible during the scenes set in the Mediterranean. Dinanath encounters groups of refugees attempting dangerous sea crossings, risking their lives in the hope of reaching safer shores (Ghosh, 2019, p. 201). These episodes situate individual stories within broader global structures of migration. Such movements resonate with Appadurai’s concept of ethnoscapes. According to Appadurai, globalization is characterized by the circulation of migrants, refugees, and workers who reshape cultural landscapes across national boundaries (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). The trajectories depicted in *Gun Island* clearly belong to this shifting landscape, linking fragile deltaic environments to distant European spaces. Migration also produces identities that extend beyond national boundaries. Migrants carry memories, languages, and traditions with them while adapting to new cultural environments. As Hall suggests, identity should be understood not as a fixed essence but as a process continually shaped by historical experience (Hall, 1990, p. 226). Through these representations, *Gun Island* portrays migration as a defining reality of the globalized world. The journeys of characters such as Tipu demonstrate how ecological crisis, economic inequality, and globalization

combine to produce new forms of mobility and cultural identity.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND GLOBAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Environmental change forms another crucial dimension of globalization in *Gun Island*. Through its depiction of the Sundarbans—one of the most ecologically fragile regions in the world—the novel illustrates how climate change transcends national boundaries and connects distant regions through shared environmental risks. The Sundarbans appear as a landscape constantly threatened by rising sea levels, cyclones, and erosion. For the communities living there, environmental change is not an abstract concept but an everyday reality. Dinanath observes that entire villages are disappearing under rising waters, forcing residents to abandon their homes (Ghosh, 2019, p. 76). This transformation directly produces migration and social instability. The narrative also connects local ecological disturbances to events occurring in distant places. In Venice, Dinanath witnesses the sudden appearance of venomous spiders—an unsettling phenomenon that suggests ecological disruption on a global scale. Reflecting on the event, he notes that “it seemed that the creatures of the earth were responding to some disturbance that humans could scarcely comprehend” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 214). Such episodes emphasize the interconnected nature of modern ecological systems. Environmental disturbances in one region can produce consequences in another, dissolving the boundaries that once separated ecosystems. This representation resonates with the ecological theory of Bruno Latour, who argues that the traditional separation between society and nature can no longer be maintained. Latour writes that “there is no longer any clear boundary between the natural and the social worlds” (Latour, 1993, p. 4). The environmental disturbances in *Gun Island* illustrate precisely this entanglement. The novel also reflects the ideas of Ulrich Beck, whose concept of the “world risk society” describes how environmental threats such as climate change produce consequences that transcend national borders. Beck argues that contemporary risks are increasingly “delocalized,” affecting societies across the globe (Beck, 1999, p. 36). Through these narrative strategies, *Gun Island* reveals the profound interconnectedness of the modern ecological world. Environmental crises in the Sundarbans cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as part of broader global processes.

V. HYBRID CULTURAL SPACES: FROM THE SUNDARBANS TO VENICE

Another important dimension of globalization in *Gun Island* is its representation of space. The narrative moves across diverse geographical locations—from the Sundarbans to Los Angeles and Venice—creating a transnational narrative structure. The Sundarbans serve as the starting point of the story, a region historically connected to maritime networks linking South Asia with other parts of the world. Dinanath initially approaches the area as a repository of folklore, but gradually he recognizes that the region’s history is deeply intertwined with global patterns of trade and migration. The narrative later shifts to Venice, a city historically associated with maritime commerce and cultural exchange. Reflecting on the city’s past, Dinanath realizes that Venice has long functioned as a meeting place for travelers and merchants from distant regions. At one point he observes that the city had always welcomed “travelers, traders and pilgrims from distant shores” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 232). A dramatic moment occurs when migrants fleeing conflict arrive in Venice by boat. Their journey echoes the voyages of earlier traders who once connected Asia and Europe through maritime routes. Observing the scene, Dinanath reflects that “the sea had always been a pathway for those driven from their homes” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 268). These spatial dynamics resonate with the ideas of Doreen Massey, who argues that places should be understood not as isolated locations but as nodes within networks of social relations. As Massey explains, places are “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Massey, 2005, p. 154). The movement from the Sundarbans to Venice illustrates this concept clearly. The novel’s portrayal of global cities also reflects the insights of Edward Soja, whose concept of spatial hybridity emphasizes the layered and interconnected nature of modern urban spaces. Venice emerges as a site where colonial histories, trade routes, and contemporary migration flows intersect. Through these interconnected locations, *Gun Island* portrays the modern world as a network of hybrid cultural spaces shaped by historical interaction and mobility.

VI. CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION AS CREATIVE ADAPTATION

Although globalization often produces cultural tensions, *Gun Island* also highlights the creative possibilities of cultural hybridization. Characters reinterpret their traditions in response to changing historical conditions, demonstrating how cultural adaptation can become a source of resilience. The reinterpretation of the Bonduki Sadagar legend provides a key example. As Dinanath

reflects on the story in light of contemporary environmental crises, the myth begins to symbolize humanity's complex relationship with nature. He realizes that the legend reflects "a timeless struggle between human ambition and the unpredictable power of nature" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 143). This reinterpretation shows that myths are not static relics but dynamic narratives capable of generating new meanings. The Bonduki Sadagar story evolves as it interacts with contemporary realities such as climate change and migration. This process reflects Hall's argument that cultural identity is always "in process" rather than fixed (Hall, 1990, p. 222). Cultural traditions survive precisely because they are capable of reinterpretation.

The experiences of migrant characters further illustrate this adaptive process. Individuals traveling from South Asia to Europe must negotiate unfamiliar environments while preserving elements of their cultural heritage. Observing their determination, Dinanath remarks that these migrants possess "an extraordinary ability to endure and adapt" despite immense hardship (Ghosh, 2019, p. 207). The novel's portrayal of cultural adaptation also resonates with the work of Paul Gilroy, who emphasizes the creative potential of cultural mixing. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy argues that identities formed through migration often produce new forms of cultural expression rather than simple cultural loss (Gilroy, 1993). Through these narratives, *Gun Island* ultimately presents cultural hybridization as a process of creative adaptation. Traditions evolve, identities transform, and communities develop new ways of understanding their place within an increasingly interconnected world.

VII. CONCLUSION

Globalization has created unprecedented connections between cultures, economies, and ecosystems. These connections generate complex cultural transformations that challenge traditional notions of identity and belonging. The novel *Gun Island* offers a powerful literary exploration of these dynamics. Through its blending of myth, migration narratives, and environmental themes, the novel illustrates how cultural hybridization emerges from the interaction between local traditions and global forces. Drawing upon theoretical insights from Bhabha, Hall, and Appadurai, this article has demonstrated that the novel portrays hybrid cultural identities as products of transnational mobility and ecological interconnectedness. Ultimately, *Gun Island* suggests that cultural hybridization is not simply a consequence of globalization but also a creative process through which cultures reinterpret their traditions in response to global change. By integrating folklore with

contemporary global realities, the novel highlights the enduring relevance of cultural memory in an increasingly interconnected world.

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